



Caution's the watchword

Medical friends tell me that there are about 7,000 troubles that can affect the human body. There may be days when you feel you are suffering from most of them, but in fact a human being goes through life and dodges all but a few dozen—and most of those are minor ones.

So too with pests and diseases in the garden. Some we will always have; most we will never see. Again with hazards in the garden, the list of possible accidents is almost endless; yet with a little common sense and some elementary precautions none of these needs to happen.

I mentioned last week the man who injured his toe when using a rotary grass cutter while wearing canvas shoes. If he had worn a stout pair of leather boots or shoes this might not have occurred.

This certainly comes into the category of accidents that could be prevented if one remembers never to allow an edged tool to come anywhere near any part of the body. I remember my first woodwork lesson at school: the master spent a long time explaining that one should always use sharp edged tools so that they are working away from one. Many mishaps happen of course, because we are tired—or plain lazy.

One of the commonest accidents still is the hoary old nonsense of leaving a rake lying on the ground with the teeth pointing upwards. You accidentally put your foot on it and the handle smacks you between the eyes. Even more improbable, yet it often happens, is the music-hall joke type of accident of a man sitting on a branch and sawing away between himself and the trunk. Or he may have placed the ladder in such a position that when he saws off a branch it will swing down and knock the ladder away. It is important, not only in the interests of safety, but also to ensure a clean cut, to make an undercut a quarter or a third of the way

through a branch before starting to cut from above.

Ladders themselves can be dangerous. A faulty rung gives way and down goes the operator. Wooden ladders should always be stored in a dry place and examined every season for rot.

Going back to powered motors: always switch off the engine if the blades become jammed and the obstruction has to be cleared. If there are children about, switch off the motor if you are called to the telephone.

If you have electrical tools, such as hedge trimmers, and several lengths of cable that have to be plugged together, lay them all out and plug them before switching on the current. And should anything go wrong with an electrical tool—it fails to function properly—switch off before you start investigating.

I have advised before and make no apology for repeating myself that all outdoor or indoor electrical installations should be tested every two or three years. This is important enough in the home, but more so with wiring in the damp conditions of sheds, greenhouses and the like.

Going back to some of the simple hazards in the garden, stone, brick, and concrete paths or steps can often be dangerous. Green slimy algae can be very slippery in wet weather. It was very prevalent after the wet autumn but has almost disappeared in this dry spring. Yet algae can be easily destroyed by watering on the ordinary tar oil wash we use on fruit trees. How often do we mean to cement in the loose brick or stone on a step or path and forget about it until somebody twists an ankle?

From my own stupid experience I would suggest great caution when trying to prune climbing roses—or even to tie in branches that have been loosened—if a strong wind is blowing. They can whip about surprisingly and one caught me across the nose leaving a neat scar to this day. There is a very neat and cheap way of avoiding this kind of accident. Make a few clips of thick wire bent into an exaggerated S shape; before starting to cut out the unwanted branches clip those you wish to retain to the wires.

A few words about chemicals. Usually they are not harmful when diluted, say, for spraying on plants. But concentrated solutions should be handled with great care. Some people suffer skin irritations from certain chemicals, so I would suggest getting into the habit of wearing rubber gloves when handling all chemicals and fertilizers. There is, for example,



Man and his muse—Sir Alan Herbert at home with his favourite shrub, *Morning Glory*.

a slight danger of contracting salmonella from handling bonemeal, and Pan Britannica Industries are now selling bonemeal that has been sterilized. All chemicals should be stored where children cannot get at them—especially those in aerosol cans. Children love to get hold of these and squirt spray over each other or anything else in sight.

One should also remove poisonous berries or seed pods, such as those of laburnum, if small children are likely to get at them. One may have trained one's own children not to eat anything without permission, but one can never be sure that their little pals have been given this same warning. One more thought about chemicals: labels fade or become detached, or they become stained and one cannot read the instructions. It is better to throw the stuff away than guess what it is, or at what strength it should be used. If you use weedkillers, keep separate cans for them—painted to indicate what they are used for—one, say, for selective lawn weedkillers and another for total weedkillers such as those used on paths or drives. Do not store selective weedkiller on a shelf in a greenhouse. I have known tomatoes to be damaged by fumes from such a container.

All these may sound trivial, but every year there are countless accidents which need never have happened.

Now to more cheerful matters—greenhouse climbers. Nothing gives more pleasure than a greenhouse festooned with a white, or yellow jasmine, the pale blue of

Plumbago capensis, the waxy white flowers of a hoyo or many other climbers. But in a small houses these climbers, when fully grown, do exclude too much light and it is preferable to grow them in large pots and train them around a framework of canes. Then by judicious pruning they can be kept within bounds and even brought into the hall or sitting room for a week or two when they flower. This system works very well with *Morning Glory*, the blue *Ipomoea rubro-caerulea*, the white form, or the red "Scarlet O'Hara". They can, of course, be grown outdoors but should not be planted out until the weather has really warmed up, say in mid-June, since young plants cannot stand cold nights.

An interesting development in recent years has been the surge in popularity of all house plants, particularly cacti and dwarfed or Bonsai trees. Like Japanese flower-arranging, Bonsai is a great art and there are all kinds of charming names for the various classic shapes into which the Japanese train their trees—a winding trunk is the "kyokkukan", an oblique trunk is the "shakan" and so on.

However, as with Japanese flower arrangement, one does not have to study to become a highly skilled artist in Bonsai. One can try to arrange flowers in the Japanese idiom and find pleasure without having to be an Ikebana graduate. So too with these Bonsai trees. They are available at quite reasonable prices, although fine old specimens can be very costly.

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